

Under the Rose Bush

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Summary: Harry discovers a mysterious object buried in the Dursleys' back garden; Snape discovers quite a number of mysterious objects buried in the drawer of his bedside table.

Under the Rose Bush

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> <p> Author's Note: This story is set during the summer of the Quidditch World Cup. It was written before Goblet of Fire was published, and hence is not consistent with post-Prisoner of Azkaban continuity.

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Under the Rose Bush

> Harry Potter leant against his shovel and mopped the sweat from his forehead. He eyed the hole he'd dug, trying to tell if it was deep enough yet for him to plant the new rose bush. Probably not, he decided. Sighing deeply, he picked up the shovel and carried on digging. <p>

Harry tried to take his mind off the hot and boring work by thinking about the Quidditch World Cup, which would be held later that summer. He'd been invited to go and see it with his best friend, Ron Weasley. Uncle Vernon, however, had made it clear that permission to do so would be contingent on Harry's good behaviour during the weeks prior.

Since then, the Dursleys had taken great pleasure in finding unpleasant tasks for Harry to do. With the threat of missing the

Quidditch World Cup hanging over his head, he didn't dare protest. That morning at breakfast, Aunt Petunia had looked at him pointedly and said that one of the rose bushes in the back garden was covered in black spot, and someone would have to cut it down and plant a new one in its place. Harry had had no choice but to volunteer.

His attention was yanked back to the job at hand when his shovel hit something solid and refused to go any further into the ground. It didn't seem to be a rock. It felt almost rubbery, but even when Harry put all his weight on the shovel, he couldn't cut through it. Curious, he began carefully removing the dirt that covered the mysterious object. When the last shovelful was scraped away, the cause of the blockage was revealed: an envelope, made of yellow parchment.

Turning his back to the house in case any of the Dursleys were watching, Harry snatched up the letter and stuffed it in his pocket. He finished planting the rose bush as quickly as he could, his thoughts racing. The envelope might merely be one of his Hogwarts letters that Uncle Vernon had missed, or one of the letters Dobby had stolen summer before last. Wizarding parchment was normally no stronger than Muggle paper, though. One of those letters shouldn't have made it past the first heavy rain, much less stopped a shovel dead.

As soon as he got back to his room, Harry took the letter out of his pocket and sat down on his bed to examine it. The envelope had a dark brown wax seal with a frog on it. In ink the same colour as the seal, it was addressed to Mr and Mrs Vernon Dursley, 4 Privet Drive. Harry stared at the envelope in astonishment. What witch or wizard would want to send a letter to the Dursleys? Could -- could it have been written by his mother before she died?

With shaking hands, Harry opened the letter. He couldn't seem to tear through the flap of the envelope, but with a few sharp tugs he was able to pull it loose from the wax seal. The letter contained two sheets of parchment folded together. When Harry took them out, several small, heavy, rectangular pieces of paper fell to the floor. He reached down, picked one up and read:

Harry Potter, the only wizard ever known to have
> survived an attack by He Who Must Not Be Named.
 Although the
curse destroyed his house, Harry
> himself was left unscathed except for a lightning-
 shaped cut
on his forehead. Immediately after,
> the Dark Lord disappeared. Harry Potter is
 currently residing
with his Muggle aunt and uncle,
> Petunia and Vernon Dursley.

On the other side was a picture Harry recognised from the photo album Hagrid had given him -- himself as an infant, being held by his mother, his father's arms around the pair of them. Underneath were the words Harry Potter -- The Boy Who Lived. It was a Famous Witches and Wizards card from a pack of Chocolate Frogs -- of Harry.

Harry gaped at the card for a moment or two, then opened up the letter and began reading:

Theobrom and Raniday

> Purveyors of Fine Magical Confectionaries

_ Dear Mr and Mrs Dursley, _

_ We are pleased to inform you of our plans to add your nephew Harry Potter to our series of Chocolate Frogs Famous Witches and Wizards cards. Unfortunately our three previous letters seem to have gone astray. The Tracing Charms on the last two indicated that whilst those letters were delivered to your doorstep, one was torn to pieces and the other burnt shortly after delivery. _

_ We have reported this possible interference with the owl post to the Ministry of Magic. If you have any suspicions as to the parties responsible, you should do likewise, particularly as some of You-Know-Who's supporters may still be at large. We have taken the additional precaution of enchanting this letter against all common types of parchment damage. _

_ Enclosed for your consideration are samples of our three proposed card designs. We would prefer to use the christening photo; little Harry looks just like a baby angel in that white lace robe. _

Harry could recall no such photo from his album, and this remark sounded alarmingly like the sort of thing Aunt Petunia often said about Dudley. Somewhat apprehensively, he gathered up the rest of the cards from the floor. The next card Harry turned over was identical to the first, but the one after that had a picture of his baby self in the arms of his godfather, Sirius Black, who looked up and smiled at him from the photo. A woman Harry had never seen before stood beside them, waving. Several other people were moving around in the background. One in particular caught his attention. Harry's mouth thinned and he glared at Peter Pettigrew, who wouldn't quite meet Harry's eyes.

The christening robe wasn't nearly as bad as some of the outfits Dudley had worn in his baby pictures, but it certainly was extremely lacy: lace at the collar, lace at the cuffs and a panel of lace over a foot long at the hem, with a fantastic pattern of moons and stars and trees and cats and owls. Harry shuddered. He could well imagine what Draco Malfoy would have to say about a Famous Witches and Wizards card of baby Harry in a lacy white robe.

Harry set the cards down and went back to the letter.

_ We feel confident that with the proper spells Sirius Black can be removed from the photograph -- _

'Good, you can use them to get rid of Pettigrew,' said Harry savagely.

_ -- but either of the other two would also be suitable. Can you give us any information about the dog that appears in the Christmas picture? The original photo had the words 'Harry and Padfoot, First Christmas' written on the back of it, yet no one we've spoken with recognised either the name or the animal itself, nor did they recall the Potters ever owning a dog. _

Harry flipped through the remaining cards. Another christening photo, then one of an enormous black dog, the transformed Sirius Black, lying in front of a Christmas tree with a bright red bow around his

neck. On the rug beside him was a five-month-old Harry, who opened his mouth and gazed curiously out of the picture at his much older real self. Sirius-Padfoot raised his head and thumped his tail against the floor.

The last card in the stack was a second copy of the Christmas photo, but felt heavier and thicker than the other cards. Harry took a closer look and saw that it was in fact two cards stuck together. He put his fingernail between them and prised them apart. Sandwiched inside, holding the cards together, was a bit of parchment with a Sticking Charm on it. It was a note, which read:

_ Sabella: _

_ Have you ever seen such a monster in all your life? The Potters must have been mad, letting a baby anywhere near that thing, it could've eaten him with one swallow. He's lucky to have lived long enough for the Dark Lord to have a go at him. Bet you five Galleons the beast turns out to be a present from Hagrid that they got rid of as soon as they decently could. _

_ Viridius _

Harry grinned, then finished reading the letter:

_ Please sign the enclosed release form and return it to us as soon as possible. _

_ Yours sincerely, _

_ Sabella Theobrom
> Director

Harry smiled grimly. It didn't look as though Theobrom and Raniday had had much luck getting their form signed either. Still, considering the picture they'd wanted to use, it was just as well. For the first time in his life Harry was actually glad that the Dursleys had such a horror of all things magical. He spread the cards out on his pillow and lay down on his front to look at them, wondering where his godfather was and what he was doing, wondering whether he and Harry would ever spend a second Christmas together.

'HAAAAAAA-RYYYYYYY!'

Aunt Petunia's screech echoed up the stairs. Giving a sigh, Harry picked up the cards and letter, hid them under the loose floorboard beneath his bed and headed downstairs to see what new work his aunt had found for him to do.

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'Here, I've got something to show you,' said Harry, rummaging in his trunk. 'I found a Chocolate Frogs card you don't have yet. You can keep it if you like, I've three of them.'

'Thanks,' said Ron. 'Is it Agrippa? Because I found Ptolemy, last summer in Egypt.'

'No, it isn't Agrippa, sorry,' Harry replied. He finally located the

letter from the Chocolate Frogs company. Taking out one of the cards with the Christmas photo, he held it up for Ron to see, covering the name with his fingers. 'Recognise anyone?' Harry grinned.

Ron came over and looked at the card in puzzlement. 'That dog -- it looks exactly like -- but it can't be -- and who --' Ron took the card from Harry's hand. When he read the name under the picture, his mouth fell open. 'Harry, is this real?' he gasped.

'Of course it's not real,' Harry laughed. 'It's a sample the manufacturers sent the Dursleys. Wait'll you see the note that was stuck to it, it'll give you a laugh.' Harry reached back into the envelope. 'There were some others with different pictures, too. I'll show them to you if you swear never to mention the one with the christening robe around Malfoy.'

'Yes, I've heard of that one,' said Ron eagerly. 'And the other one, with your mum and dad ...'

'You've heard of it?' Harry echoed, his smile vanishing. 'These cards, they never actually came out, did they?'

'No, the one with your parents on it was about to, but some of their friends got wind of it and complained to the Ministry of Magic. There was an enquiry, and it turned out the company didn't have permission from a guardian to use your picture.'

'Yeah, the Dursleys were tearing up their letters,' Harry said. 'They'd put some kind of spell on this one, I found it buried underneath a rose bush. I suppose they gave up when they still got no answer.'

'It wasn't just that,' said Ron. 'It came out that there was another card with Sirius Black on it, and how they'd got the photos -- sent someone round to Pettigrew's mother's house not two days after he was killed ... well, everyone thought he was killed. Theobrom and Raniday were getting a lot of bad publicity. It wasn't the first time they'd been investigated for dodgy business practices. Nor the last either -- Dad was in on a Muggle labour exploitation case a few years ago.'

'Muggle labour exploitation?' said Harry. 'What's that?'

'Hiring Muggles, which is illegal anyway, and then instead of paying them, using a Memory Charm to make them forget they'd done the work. There wasn't enough evidence to make any charges stick, though. Sabella Theobrom is quite clever, Dad says. She started at Hogwarts after he left -- Slytherin, of course -- but he's heard things from people who were there with her. Anyway, Theobrom and Raniday must've been up to something back then too, because they really didn't want the Ministry poking around the place. Instead of putting up a fight, they agreed to pay a fine and cancel the card. But they'd made nearly three hundred samples of the one with your parents, and most of them were already gone -- for advertising, to big customers, people who worked there taking them for their children ...'

'What about the one with the christening robe?' Harry asked anxiously.

'The cards with Sirius Black -- the human Sirius, I mean -- are a lot

rarer. Theobrom and Raniday were trying to have the pictures enchanted so he'd hand you over to someone else and leave the photo, but no one they asked could get the spells right. There were less than thirty samples of those ones made. They go for hundreds of Galleons at auction.'

'Oh, come off it, Ron,' Harry scoffed. 'Who'd pay that much for a Chocolate Frogs card?'

'A serious collector would!' said Ron indignantly. 'I have an old value guide if you don't believe me!' He looked back down at the card Harry had given him. 'As for this one, I didn't even know there was a third design being planned. None of them have ever turned up before.'

Ron stared at the card in awe. Then his face fell, and he reluctantly held it out to Harry.

'You can't give me this, it probably is worth more than our whole house ...'

'Too late now, I've already given it to you.' said Harry firmly. 'Er -- those auctions -- the Sirius Black cards -- Malfoy's never got hold of one, has he?'

'I dunno,' Ron frowned. 'His father's certainly rich enough to afford it, but I've never heard of him being a card collector. Mind, a lot of them have gone to anonymous bidders, a lot more than rare cards usually do. I mean, buying a card with You-Know-Who's second-in-command on it -- it looks a bit suspicious.'

'Once we prove Sirius is innocent, no one will be embarrassed by them anymore,' said Harry sharply. 'Well, no one except me. But I reckon if Malfoy had one the whole school would know by now. That lace robe -- he'd have a field day.'

'Don't worry about it,' advised Ron. 'They don't turn up that often. Unless someone else finds a letter under their rose bush, you should be safe.'

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Severus Snape woke to the light of the midday sun shining through his bedroom window. He dragged himself out of bed, poured some water from the jug and basin set on the chest of drawers and splashed it on his face. Finishing off that bottle of nettle wine had definitely been a mistake. Now he had a splitting headache to contend with in addition to the newly appointed Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher,

Snape sat down on the edge of his bed and reached into the drawer of the bedside table. He was positive there was a Comforting Concoction in there somewhere. It would be nearly seven years old, but even if it had started to go off, drinking it wouldn't do him any harm -- it simply wouldn't help his headache very much.

Three bottles later -- Flesh Eating Slug Repellent, Attar of Crabgrass and the special hairball remedy he brewed on occasion for Professor McGonagall -- Snape gave up, pulled out the whole drawer and dumped its contents onto the bed. He began pushing aside pieces of wrinkled parchment, quills with bent feathers and other bits of

rubbish. There was the packet of dried sea squirts he'd been looking for since April ... There was the root-chopping knife he'd been looking for since March ... There were McGonagall's spare glasses _she'd_ been looking for since February.

How they'd found their way into the drawer of his bedside table, he didn't really want to know. Perhaps the wretched things truly could move about under their own power, as she'd often claimed. More likely Fred and George Weasley had something to do with it. McGonagall would be well served if he returned them to her that evening at dinner, and told the entire staff table where he'd found them. She let the students in her house get away with anything, particularly _Harry Potter -- The Boy Who Lived_.

Snape froze. Slowly he drew the card out from under the mummified rat that half-covered it. Sirius Black glared angrily up at him and tightened his arms protectively around the baby Harry. Headache, Comforting Concoction and McGonagall-baiting forgotten, Snape let an evil smile creep over his face. The upcoming school year was suddenly looking to be a much better one than it had the night before.

â€" THE END â€"

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> <p> Related Stories:

An Unwelcome Visitor - Takes place after Harry finds the cards, but before he shows them to Ron. Explains why Snape was so pleased at the chance to get revenge on Harry.

The Serpent - Find out what Snape does with his card.

The Serpent of Lord Voldemort - For some reason, Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy seem to be taking an interest in Harry's Famous Wizard cards.

Thank you to all the people who've reviewed my stories.

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